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ABSTRACT

Parents have a major influence on their children's attitudes toward work and life. Handicapped youth, who have more difficulty than other youth in making the transition from school to work and adult life, have a special need for parental guidance. Parents can play key roles in transition, especially in the areas of career exploration, job search and survival, independent living skills, and collaboration with educators and other service providers. Parents can share some career exploration activities, such as identifying famous people who have achieved success despite their disabilities, learning about work site modification, and taking the adolescent to various businesses and pointing out the different jobs and their duties. In the area of job search and survival, parents can demonstrate the techniques of finding job leads, assist in the preparation of a resume, practice interviewing, and help develop good work habits. Parents can identify those independent living skills already gained as well as those that need to be developed in the areas of transportation, housing and home management, financial management, decision making, and interpersonal skills. Finally, parents can collaborate with educators in developing the student's Individualized Education Program and monitoring their child's progress in following it. In all of these transition areas, parents are important role models. Their children form opinions about the value of work, different careers, and self-worth from what they observe their parents saying and doing. The example parents present their children may be their most important role in the transition process. (KC)

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PARENTS' ROLE IN TRANSITION FOR HANDICAPPED YOUTH

OVERVIEW

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON ADULT, CAREER, AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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OVERVIEW

ERIC DIGEST NO. 62

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

PARENTS' ROLE IN TRANSITION FOR HANDICAPPED YOUTH

Parents have a major influence on their children's attitudes toward work and life. Many studies have recognized the effect of parental influence on educational and career decisions (Naylor 1986). Handicapped youth, who have more difficulty than other youth in making the transition from school to work and adult life, have a special need for parental guidance.

Transition can be defined as a systematic process to establish and implement a plan for the employment or additional training of a handicapped adolescent (Sitlington 1986). This Overview discusses the key roles parents can play in transition, especially in the areas of career exploration, job search and survival, independent living skills, and collaboration with educators and other service providers. It is based primarily upon the three parent guides in the *Corridors to Careers* package (Izzo, Kopp, and Liming 1986).

Roles in Career Exploration

Parents sometime overestimate the effects of a disability on their child's ability to accomplish a task. Lacking information about the requirements of specific occupations, they may rule out certain jobs as impossible. The process of career exploration involves learning more about individual limitations and strengths and about the requirements of various entry-level occupations, assessing individual interests, and matching interests and abilities with appropriate potential occupations.

Izzo, Kopp, and Liming (1986) describe some career exploration activities in which parents and handicapped youth can share. These include the following:

- Identify famous people who have achieved success despite their disability.
- Use checklists to identify the adolescent's personal qualities, capabilities, and ideal working conditions. Gather information from teachers, counselors, and close relatives as well.
- Take the adolescent to various businesses and point out the different jobs and their duties.
- Find out about interest surveys and aptitude tests that a trained professional can administer.
- Select an object in the home and identify all the people whose work made it possible.
- Gather information about potential occupations by using library resources, talking to people currently working, or visiting work sites.
- Find out about appropriate training options, such as high school vocational education, vocational rehabilitation, apprenticeships, 2-year or technical colleges, and supported or sheltered employment.
- Learn about work site modifications that may be needed to accommodate a disability.

Roles in Job Search and Survival

Parents can demonstrate the techniques of finding job leads, beginning with the help wanted ads. Before using them, abbreviations and terms that may be encountered should be explained; the adolescent can practice selecting an ad and explaining why the job is or is not desirable or appropriate. Other sources of leads include the telephone directory, school job placement office, state employment office, Rehabilitation Services Agency, private and temporary employment agencies, door-to-door canvassing, and job clubs.

Parents can assist in the preparation of a good resume by helping the adolescent think of accomplishments; by checking the information for accuracy and correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation; and by helping to identify persons who might give references. They might collect sample application forms from local businesses for practice in filling out application forms and preparing letters of application. Parents can also ensure that all the necessary documents (birth certificate, social security card, and so on) have been obtained.

To make their child comfortable with interviewing, parents can describe what happens during the process, can review strategies for success, and can assist in practicing responses to difficult questions. A mock interview can be conducted and the performance can be rated on such aspects as grooming and appearance, eye contact, poise, manners, enthusiasm, and so forth.

For handicapped youth, the most sensitive part of an interview is talking about their disability. Making the interviewer comfortable with the situation, stressing abilities, and responding positively about accommodations or modifications are ways of dealing with this area. Parents and youth should also be aware of the legal rights of handicapped workers as established by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Developing good work habits is essential to job survival. Through discussion and role playing, parents can stress the importance of following directions, being on time, taking pride in one's work, getting along with others, coping with problems, dressing appropriately, communicating clearly, being motivated, showing a willingness to learn, and demonstrating commitment to the occupation.

Roles in Independent Living Skills

The final step in the transition process is learning to live independently. Survival skills help adults cope with change, meet daily needs, and face challenges. Parents can begin by identifying those independent living skills already gained as well as those that need to be developed. A list of skills and appropriate activities follows.

Transportation

- Consider the specific disability, available community resources, and the individual situation (home location, financial resources).
- Evaluate the alternatives (bus, carpool, own car, bicycle, walking) according to availability, cost, and reliability.

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- Practice using available transportation. First, parents can plan outings, then have their child guide them on an outing, then have the child attempt a solo trip.

Housing and Home Management

- Explore housing options, evaluating types, functions, costs, advantages, and disadvantages. Visit realtors, apartment managers, social service agencies, and group homes.
- Build the adolescent's home management skills by assigning regular household responsibilities. Evaluate the ability to keep records, identify sources of assistance, conduct business matters, make basic repairs, operate appliances safely, and use the right tools and products.

Financial Management

- Provide a weekly allowance to teach planning and budgeting. Evaluate the ability to make change, write checks, establish credit, make purchasing decisions, select insurance, and assess satisfactory service.
- Have the adolescent develop a budget based on projected income and expenses. Demonstrate the use of banking services. Ensure the mastery of basic math skills needed for handling money.

Decision Making

- Explain the steps of problem solving and the differences between responsible and irresponsible behavior.
- Through structured activities, allow the child to take responsibility for planning and problem solving, for example, on a family vacation.

Interpersonal Skills

- Encourage the improvement of personal relations skills through participation in family, school, community, and church activities.
- Teach the following assertiveness techniques: react with behavior instead of words; talk directly to people whose actions affect you; talk about yourself realistically but positively; and say no when appropriate.
- Teach the following skills for responding appropriately to insensitive people and situations: look for early signs of insensitivity, recognize one's emotional reactions, count to 10 before reacting, and choose an appropriate, constructive reaction.

Collaboration with Service Providers

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) can be an effective tool for coordinating the transition of special needs students. Schools are required by law to involve parents in the IEP planning process. Parents can influence this process by giving input at the initial meeting, monitoring and evaluating progress, and making suggestions for modifications.

According to Izzo, Kopp, and Liming (1986), the IEP should do the following:

- Include a specific transition plan that ensures that services continue after employment, contains precisely stated objectives and activities, and involves employers, rehabilitation and employment counselors, and other community-based personnel in the transition team.
- Focus on functional living skills by integrating instruction in reading, writing, and math with independent living skills.
- Include one school-supported work experience. Parents can suggest employers who may be willing to hire their adolescent for a paid or nonpaid position that is monitored by the school.

Parents should obtain the rules and regulations guiding the implementation of the IEP. They can request periodic reports from the school about their child's progress in meeting the objectives and can initiate changes in the plan to deal with problems that arise.

Parents as Role Models

In all of the transition areas discussed, parents are important role models. Their children form opinions about the value of work, different careers, and self-worth from what they observe their parents saying and doing. Parents demonstrate survival skills in day-to-day living. Sharing the strategies they use to solve problems, their feelings about particular issues, and why and how they pursue certain hobbies or find information are ways that parents can help their children learn survival techniques. The examples parents present their children may be their most important role in the transition process.

This ERIC digest is based on the following publication:

Izzo, M. V.; Kopp, K.; and Liming, R. *Corridors to Careers. A Guide for Parents and Disabled Youth.* Columbus: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University; Omro, WI: Conover Company, 1986.

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Sitlington, P. L. *Transition, Special Needs, and Vocational Education.* Information Series no. 309. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1986. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 272 769).

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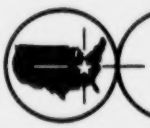

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